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A NOTE ON ANCIENT MEXICAN FOLK-LORE.¹

OUR knowledge of the superstitions, omens, and fabulous monsters of ancient Mexican folk-lore is mostly derived from the writings of Fray Bernardino de Sahagun. This gifted Franciscan friar, a native of Old Spain, and a graduate of the University of Salamanca, went to Mexico in 1529, — a few years after the Conquest.

Having a natural tendency to investigation and research, and led by the desire to obtain a thorough knowledge of the ancient superstitions of the Indians in order to detect all lingering trace of them and root them out effectually, the Spanish monk carefully noted every fact of the kind that he could draw out of the Indians themselves or that came under his notice. "For how," he exclaims, "are we priests to preach against idolatrous practices, superstitious observances, abuses and omens, if we are not acquainted with these? If we remain in ignorance of the roots of idolatrous rites, they can be practised in our presence, and we are not able to understand them and may even excuse them as some do, thinking they are merely silly or childish observances."

It thus came about that Fray Bernardino collected much valuable material and wrote some interesting chapters on native superstitions. From these I have drawn the following data, giving as often as possible literal translations of the quaint and simple narratives.

The friar relates that: "In former times, before the arrival of the Spaniards, the natives of Mexico believed in many signs by which they could foretell the future. It was considered an evil omen when the cries of wild beasts or strange humming sounds were heard at night, for these betokened misfortune and disaster, death or enslavement, to some member of a household. When such sounds had been heard it was customary to consult one of the soothsayers or diviners called Tonalpouleque, who knew how to interpret these omens. He consoled and cheered the person who consulted him in the following manner, saying: —

"My poor little son, thou hast come to seek the reason of the omen that has come to thee, and desirest to look into the mirror that contains the explanation or elucidation of what alarms thee. Know that this omen betokens adversity and hardship, and that thou wilt have to encounter poverty and misery. It is not because I tell thee this that thou art to believe it, but because such has been said and written by our elders and forefathers.

"Perhaps he by whom we live is angry with thee and does not

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desire that thou shouldst continue to live. Await, however, with courage what is about to befall thee, for so it is written in the books that we use for interpreting omens to those to whom they befall. It is not I who am causing thee terror or fear, but it is the Lord God himself who has desired that this should happen to thee. And thou art not to put blame upon the animal, because it is ignorant of what it does and lacks reason and understanding. Unfortunate man! thou must blame no one, for these unforeseen disasters belong to the sign under which thou wast born, and it is only the verification of the curse of thy sign of nativity. Take courage, for thou art compelled to undergo the experience! Take heart to bear it, and meanwhile weep and do penance! Take heed now of what I shall tell thee to do in order to remedy thy miserable condition. Do penance and make preparations for the offering that thou art obliged to make. Fetch paper and buy white incense and gum and the other things that thou knowest to be necessary for this offering. When thou hast provided all that is necessary, come to me on such and such a day that is opportune for making the offering to the god of fire. Come to me, for it is I who will arrange and distribute the papers and the rest in the proper way and in the proper places. It is I also who must go and set fire to them in thy dwelling.' ”

The authenticity of the above discourse is unquestionable, and it gives us a glimpse of ancient Mexican life that is full of human interest. In order to complete the picture, I am tempted to translate in full the fine and thoughtful harangue contained in a subsequent chapter of Sahagun's work.

This chapter tells of a bird named Oactli, or Oacton, that sang in two different ways, according to which the omen was either good or bad. When it sang the song of evil portent, travellers who heard it bowed their heads and walked in silence and fear, for they knew that some of them would fall ill, die speedily, or be taken prisoner by the people to whose land they were going. If the travellers belonged to the class of merchants they said to each other: “Some evil is going to come to us: the rising of a river may carry us or our merchandise away, or we may fall in the hands of robbers; . . . perhaps we may be eaten by wild beasts, or we may meet with hostilities.” Whereupon their chief, walking amongst them, began to cheer and console them, and pronounce the following discourse as he walked along:

“Sons and brothers: it is not proper that you should become sad and frightened, for we all knew very well when we left our homes that such calamities might befall us. We knew that we were about to offer ourselves to death, and we saw the tears and lamentations of our relatives who gave us to understand that they also thought it possible that in some mountain or cañon we might leave our bones, spill our

blood, and sow our hairs. Now the omen has come to us, and it is not proper that any one should be faint-hearted, as though he were a timid, weak woman. Let us prepare to die like men. Let us pray to our Lord God, and do not indulge in surmises, for if anything is to happen to us we shall soon know it from actual experience. It will be time for us to weep then : meanwhile think of our glory and fame, and of what we owe to our superiors and predecessors, the noble and estimable merchants from whom we descend. For we are not the first, nor shall we be the last, to whom these misfortunes happen : many before and many after us will find themselves in the same position, therefore take courage, my sons, and be brave men."

In order to avert the impending disaster certain rites were, however, observed when they prepared to camp that night, wherever it might happen to be. Uniting all their travellers' staffs, they tied them in a bundle and called this the image of the god of the merchants, Yacatecuhtli. In front of this bundle of staffs, they then drew blood from their ears with great humility and reverence. Piercing their tongues, they passed twigs of willow through them, and offered these, covered with blood, to the bundle. This was in token of their resolution to bear in patience any evil that their god might inflict upon them. Having performed this act of submission, they sought to dismiss the matter from their minds and to meet their fate calmly, — only some, who were timid, continued to meditate upon it in fear.

Besides the Oacton there were other birds whose songs foretold misfortune.

The nocturnal screeching of an owl in the vicinity of a dwelling betokened the approach of death or disaster to one or more of its inmates, and this superstition lingers on in Mexico to the present day. Indian women there are still stricken with terror, and tremble, when a certain kind of bird alights on their huts and sings, and they employ every means to scare it away, for husbands regard its appearance as proof of their wives' infidelity.

A small owlet was named the messenger of the "lord of the land of the dead," and it was supposed to spend its time flying to and fro between both worlds. It announced coming death by screaming on the roof and scratching with its claws. But the Mexicans had devised two sentences containing words of abuse addressed to the owlet, one formula for the use of men, the other for women, and by pronouncing these death and disaster could be averted.

It was considered very unlucky when a weasel or a rabbit entered one's house, and we are told that when a weasel crossed the path of an Indian his hair actually stood on end, and he shook and even fainted with fear, for it betokened speedy death.

A series of peculiar observances was performed when a certain insect named *Pinaviztli* entered a dwelling. This insect is curiously described as resembling a spider in form, but being of the size of a mouse. It was smooth and had no hairs on its thick body, and was partly red and partly black or dark. Its entrance into a house was a bad omen, but this was counteracted by the following ceremonies : A cross directed to the four quarters was drawn on the floor, and the insect was taken and placed in its centre. Spitting on it, the man asked it the following question : "Why hast thou come? I want to know, why hast thou come?" Then he watched to see in what direction the insect would move. If it went to the north, he became convinced that it was a sign that he was to die ; but if it took another direction, he believed that some other misfortune, of minor importance, was about to befall him. So he said to the insect : "Go thy way, I do not care about thee," etc., and then he took it to a cross-road and left it there. Some Indians treated it differently, and, seizing it, first passed a hair through its body and attached it to a stick, leaving it hanging until the next day. If it had then disappeared, they suspected that some harm was about to befall them. But if it was still there they were consoled, and after spitting or sprinkling some pulque on the insect, thus making it intoxicated, they felt assured that the omen signified nothing.

A meeting with this same insect was not always unlucky, for under certain circumstances it meant that he who saw it was about to receive a present of something good to eat.

It does not strike one as particularly strange that it was considered alarming and unlucky when a skunk entered a dwelling ; it was, however, thought a fatal omen only when the animal was a female and brought forth her young in some hidden corner of the habitation.

It is curious, however, to learn that parents admonished their children to close their lips tightly and never to expectorate with signs of disgust when they smelled a skunk, however strong the odor might be, for it was believed that if they did so their hair would turn suddenly white.

When ants made a nest in a dwelling it was considered a sign that some envious or malicious person had placed them there with the evil purpose of thus bringing misfortune to the household.

The presence of a frog or of a mouse was accounted for in the same way, and in such cases it was customary to consult the soothsayers or diviners without delay and obtain charms from them that would counteract the evil charm.

The ancient Mexicans believed in a series of strange apparitions or phantasms that are enumerated and described by the Franciscan friar. He relates that the Indians regarded these as mere illusions

created by Tezcatlipoca, an imaginary personage whose name means "smoking mirror," and who has been identified by some writers as the moon or as a god of the night. Although their appearance was an ill omen, brave men did not fear them, but boldly attacked and seized them, and having them in their power extorted presents from them, consisting of the thorny points of the agave leaves. These magic gifts endowed their possessor with strength and bravery, and insured his capturing as many prisoners as the phantom gave him thorns.

Thus while the apparition of a phantasm betokened death and misfortune to the timid, it offered the brave an opportunity for procuring supernatural favors.

The strangest of all the phantasms described is, perhaps, the Youaltepoztlí, literally, "the night hatchet or axe." It manifested itself by causing loud intermittent sounds resembling those produced by the blows of an axe in splitting wood. These ominous sounds were audible at dead of night in the mountains, and inspired terror, for they were said to be illusions produced by Tezcatlipoca in order to frighten and mock those who were out in the dark. When a brave man heard them, instead of taking to flight, he followed the sound of the blows, and as soon as he perceived a semblance to a human figure he quickly ran towards it and seized it firmly. But it was not easy to do so, for the phantom ran to and fro for a long time. At last it pretended to be worn out and stood still, waiting for its pursuer, who perceived that the spectre bore the semblance of a man without a head. Its neck was like a trunk of a tree that has been cut, and its chest was wide open and had at each side what was like a small swinging door that opened and shut as the phantom ran. When these doors closed and met they produced the strange sounds like hollow blows.

Now if the man in pursuit was a brave warrior or priest, he looked into the opening, and perceiving the heart of the phantom introduced his hand and seized it as though he would tear it out. With this in his grasp he demanded strength and bravery or riches, for it was in the power of Tezcatlipoca to grant anything that was asked for, although he did not dispense his favors equally.

The phantom responded to the demand by saying, "Brave and courteous friend, release me, what dost thou wish? what dost thou desire me to give thee?" The man replied, "I shall not release thee, for I have captured thee." Whereupon the phantom offered him one agave thorn, saying, "Here is a thorn, release me." But he who grasped the phantom, if sufficiently brave, did not content himself with one, but only relinquished his hold when he had obtained three or four of these gifts. These insured his capturing as many

prisoners in war, and since military honors depended upon the taking of prisoners, the man thus secured for himself and gained from the phantom future honors, riches, and the insignia of brave warriors.

Padre Sahagun also relates that some less courageous men simply tore out the heart of the spectre without speaking to it, and then fled at full speed, hiding and keeping the heart with great care and wrapping and tying it up in cloths. On the following morning they unfolded these and examined the contents. If they found auspicious signs, such as one or two thorns or bird's down or cotton, they knew that it meant good fortune and prosperity. If they found charcoal or a piece of dirty rag it meant misery and bad luck.

When the phantasm of the night hatchet was heard by a coward, who did not attempt to chase or follow it, he was filled with terror at the evils that were about to befall him on account of the terrible omen.

The malignant night spirit Tezcatlipoca sometimes assumed the form of a skunk, and the odor of this animal was then attributed to him. It also took the shape of a coyote, and stood in the pathway of travellers in threatening attitudes in order to terrorize them. Sometimes it was seen at night under the form of a corpse prepared for burial, that wailed and sobbed. If any one was brave enough to approach this spectre and clutch at it, he would find himself grasping a piece of sod or earth.

Another nocturnal phantasm was a human skull that suddenly leapt up to one's knee, and then followed behind, producing a hollow sound as it bounded along. Sahagun relates that when an Indian heard this awful sound he fled in terror, but it followed and ran when he ran, and halted when he halted. If he attempted to seize it, it sprang to one side and eluded him, so that at last, worn out with fatigue and terror, he was obliged to abandon the chase and fly to his house.

The apparition of a small female dwarf at night was a presage of misfortune or death. This spectre is described as having long loose hair to its waist and as waddling along like a duck. It also evaded the pursuer and vanished and reappeared unexpectedly.

Finally, there were spectres without heads or feet that rolled along the ground uttering moans like a person in agony. If these were pursued and seized, they also bought their release by giving agave thorns and favors to their courageous victor.

In reviewing these spectral apparitions, it is extremely interesting to trace in ancient Mexican folk-lore the familiar idea that supernatural forms could be vanquished and made to bend to the will of any one daring enough to approach them without fear.

I will now pass on to an account of some of the fabulous and monstrous animals that were supposed to inhabit the depths of the tropical forests, where they lay in wait for human prey. The most strikingly strange and original of all of these is the small aquatic monster to whom Sahagun in his eleventh book devotes the following quaint chapter that I will translate in full :—

“There is an unheard-of animal in this country that lives in the water and is called the Ahuizotl. Its size is that of a small dog ; its hair is very slippery and short, it has small pointed ears, and its body is black and smooth. It has hands and feet like a monkey, and a long tail at the extremity of which there is what is like a human hand. It lives in the deep sources of water, and when any human being approaches the banks of the water in the depths of which it lives, it seizes him with the hand at the end of its tail, drags him under the water to the bottom of the pool. Then it creates a tempest in the water, and this becomes agitated and forms waves that break against the banks producing white foam. Then many fishes and frogs ascend from the depths to the surface of the water and create a great disturbance there. He who was thus dragged down dies, and after a few days his body is cast up by the waves, and is found to be without eyes, without teeth, and without nails, for all these were taken from him by the Ahuizotl. The body itself exhibits no wounds, but is all covered with bruises or livid spots. No person dared to touch such a drowned body. The priests were immediately informed of its presence, for they were the only ones who were deemed worthy to touch it. They fetched it and carried it on a litter with great reverence, and buried it in one of the oratories called Ayauhtcalco — literally house in or surrounded by water. For it was said that the Tlalocs (or rain-gods) had sent his soul to the terrestrial paradise. They adorned the litter with mace-reeds, and it was preceded by musicians playing on flutes. If, by chance, any layman tried to lift such a corpse from the water, he was sure to drown also or to become a victim to gout.

It was believed that such a death occurred for one of two reasons : either the deceased had been very good, and therefore the rain-gods desired his company in the terrestrial paradise ; or he had, perchance, certain precious stones in his possession. This would give offence to the rain-gods, who do not wish that persons should possess precious stones, and for this reason they may have killed him in anger, but nevertheless taken him to the terrestrial paradise. The relatives of such a dead person found consolation in knowing that he was with the gods in the said paradise, and that through him they were to become rich and prosperous in this world. The surviving relatives also had another superstition, and imagined that their

parent might pray that some of them should join him in the terrestrial paradise. In the dread of also being drowned or killed by lightning, they avoided bathing as much as possible.

It was said that this monstrous animal resorted to an artifice, in order to capture men when a long time had elapsed without his having taken any. He united a great number of fish and frogs, and caused them to jump and move about the surface of the water close to his hiding-place. Attracted by these, the covetous fishermen approached and cast their nets. Then the Ahuizotl captured one of them, drowned him and carried him to his subterranean watery cave.

This small monster also employed another stratagem for the same purpose when he had not taken any human victim for a long time. He placed himself at the edge of his pond, and began to weep and cry like a child. The passer-by hearing this was deceived, and when he approached the edge of the water he was seized by the hand at the end of the tail, dragged down, and carried to the cave of the Ahuizotl, who killed him there.

It was also said that whoever perceived this monster and was not filled with consternation at the sight, and was not attacked by the animal, was sure to die soon.

It is related that an old woman who went to fetch water once caught such an animal, put it into her jug, covered this with her petticoat, and carried it to show it to the chieftains of the village. They told her that she had committed a sin in doing this, for the animal was a subject and a friend of the rain-gods. She was then ordered to carry it back to the place where she had found it."

The identification of this monster with some living animal whose fear-inspiring and mysterious habits gave rise to these fabulous accounts is a task to be referred to zoölogists. Owing to the fact that one of Montezuma's predecessors bore the name of this animal, there exist numerous pictures of it, employed to express the name of the Mexican chieftain.

In these the Ahuizotl is usually represented as a smooth, rat-like animal, with a long prehensile tail. It is invariably accompanied by the conventional sign for water, but there is no trace of the fabulous human hand at the end of the monster's tail in any picture known. The most remarkable and interesting representation of the Ahuizotl probably in existence is its effigy carved in stone belonging to the Uhde Collection of Mexican Antiquities now in the Royal Ethnographical Museum at Berlin. It answers precisely to the above description of the size and appearance of the monster, and is represented as crouching on a large smooth coil formed by its long thick tail. The symbol for water is carved on its back and around the edge of the square base on which the animal and its coil rests. There is no

sign of the hand, nor is the end of the tail visible. It is barely possible that it was carved on the corner of the slab that is, unfortunately, broken off. It seems more likely, however, that the animal was supposed to conceal it while lying in wait and that the sculptor intentionally avoided defining the length of the monstrous tail.

I will now give a translation of a curious chapter on "A water serpent that is very monstrous in its ferocious deeds."

"There is a serpent in this country that is called the Acoatl or Tlilcoatl (literally, water snake or black snake). It lives in the water or in the mire and is very long. Its girth is as much as a man's arms can reach about. He has a great head at the back of which are beardlike appendages like those of the barbel, a fresh-water fish. It is shiny black, has blazing eyes and a bifurcated tail. It lives in caverns and sources deep under the water, and eats fishes. By means of its breath it has the power of sucking towards itself from afar fishes, and even persons whom it drowns in the water and then eats. In order to capture human beings, this serpent employs a remarkable stratagem. Close to its watery abode it excavates a small pool of about the size of a basin. Then it catches some large fish, such as barbels, etc., in the deep caverns and carries them in its mouth to the small pool. Before throwing them into it this monster raises its head and looks about, then he returns to fetch more fish. Some Indians who are bold take advantage of its absence, catch the fish that are in the small pond, and run away with them. When the serpent returns and sees what has happened it lifts itself erect upon its tail and looks about in all directions. It can perceive the fugitive even at a great distance, and can also scent his track. With the rapidity of an arrow it darts after him, seeming to fly over the grasses and bushes. Having reached him it twists itself tightly about his neck and introduces the ends of its bifurcated tail into the man's nostrils, or another opening of his body. Then it tightens itself around the body of he who stole the fishes and kills him.

"If this man be, however, well advised, he looks about for a hollow tree close by before he ventures to take the fishes. On running away he hides in this hollow, and the serpent winds itself around the tree and tightens its coils so violently that it dies. Then the man escapes.

"The serpent has also another method for killing those who pass by its haunt. It comes out on the bank of the water and spits its venom at the passer-by, who falls to the ground as though intoxicated. Then the serpent sucks its victim towards it with a powerful breath, and, notwithstanding its convulsions, seizes it in its fangs, drags it into the water, and devours it there."

Many who are present are undoubtedly familiar with the name Quetzalcoatl, the feathered or plumed serpent, as that of a mythical personage of Mexican history. Others have probably seen some of the stone effigies of a coiled serpent, covered with feathers, that abound in collections of Mexican antiquities. Few will, however, be aware that the existence of a plumed serpent was actually believed in by the ancient Mexicans. Sahagun preserves the following description.

"There is another serpent that is named Quetzalcoatl, and it abounds in the hot lands and province of Totonacapan (Guatemala). It is of about the same medium size as a water-snake. It is called Quetzalcoatl because it grows feathers of the same kind as the precious tail-feathers of the Quetzal bird. His neck is covered with small light green feathers (called tzinitzcan) and its breast is red. His tail and rings are covered with blue feathers like those of the Xiuhtotl. This serpent rarely appears and it is not known how it sustains itself. When it appears, it is only to bite him who sees it, and as its wound is mortal, he dies immediately. This serpent flies when it wants to bite and it destroys itself in doing so, exhaling at one time its venom and its own life."

In reviewing the above description one is tempted to believe that a long-tailed brilliant Quetzal bird, unexpectedly seen close to the ground, may have given rise to the singular belief.

It may also be worth investigating whether this beautiful bird may not occasionally fall prey to certain serpents and thus become connected with the species. It certainly seems significant that the Plumed Serpent is described as resembling the Quetzal bird, and as inhabiting precisely the region where this abounds.

The following description of a fabulous serpent will be found rather inexplicable :—

"There is another serpent called the Chimalcoatl" (or shield serpent). "It is long and thick, and carries on its back, made of its own flesh, what is like a brightly painted shield. This serpent rarely appears, and those who see it consider it either a bad or a good omen. Some think that it betokens death to those who see it, and others say that it means that they are to be prosperous and brave in warfare."

Another serpent equally fanciful is the Xicalcoatl, or the serpent of the jicara, or gourd chocolate cup such as is used for drinking. "There are large and small serpents of this kind, and they live in the water. When they are fully grown, they develop naturally, on their backs, gourd cups that are brightly painted with all kinds of colors and patterns. When this serpent wishes to capture persons, it goes to a place where it can be seen by passers-by and exhibits the painted

cup above the water, upon which it seems to float, while it conceals itself under the surface. Those who see it enter the water and try to seize the cup, but little by little it floats away towards the deep places, followed by the man. As soon as he reaches his depth, the water becomes disturbed and waves are formed that drown him. It is said that this serpent is black, but that its belly is variegated."

A survival of this superstition exists in Mexico to the present day, and children are warned against the seductions of painted jicaras floating on the water. For it is said that they are placed there by the maleficent fairy "Malinche" to lure people to certain death.

I cannot withstand making a few more allusions to Sahagun's voluminous chapter on serpents.

One of these was named the Ecacoatl or wind-serpent, a name the derivation of which is explained as follows: when it goes anywhere over a plain or over shrubbery, it erects itself on its tail and advances like the wind. In passing it seems to create a thin current of cool air.

Whilst the identification of the flying monsters may offer some difficulties to naturalists, it is not so with the two-headed serpent described by Sahagun, that M. Bemis Simeon designates as the curious *Amphisbœna*, a kind of serpent that actually has its two extremities so much alike that it appears to have a head at each end and ability to move either way. The native description of this harmless serpent, that is often found in nests of termites, where it feeds on the young ants, is as follows:—

At each extremity it has a head, each of these with eyes, mouth, teeth, and tongue. It advances in either direction, sometimes one head guides it, sometimes the other. It is named the dreadful or frightful serpent, and rarely appears, but there were various ill omens connected with it.

Another fabulous monster was the great Mazacoatl or deer-serpent, that had rattles on its tail and what were like deer's antlers on its head. It lived in precipitous mountains in caves, and never left its abode, for it was able to draw towards it with its breath as many rabbits, birds, deer, and persons as it required for its food.

A lengthy description is also given by Sahagun of certain serpents that congregate in great numbers, and weave themselves into a petate or mat. As they allow their heads to form a sort of outer fringe to the mat, this could move about in all directions at will, as a solid body. A quaint picture of such a living mat is given in the Laurentian MSS.

Without having by any means exhausted the list of fabulous serpents, I will now record some superstitions relating to the coyote.

It is described as "possessing diabolical powers. When it wishes to kill it breathes on its victim first, and this suffices to infect and terrorize it. Whenever any person deprives the coyote of its prey, it notes this, awaits a favorable opportunity, and takes revenge by killing his poultry or other domestic animals. If the offender happens not to possess such, the coyote waits until he undertakes a journey, then places itself in his way, and barks at him as though it would devour him, thus inspiring terror. Sometimes it calls to its assistance several other coyotes, so as to terrorize the man more effectually, and it does this by day as well as by night. On the other hand, this animal also has excellent qualities and a grateful disposition."

Padre Sahagun gravely proceeds to relate that in his time the following incident occurred with a coyote, and that he deems it worthy of note :—

A traveller was met on his path by one of these animals, who beckoned to him with its paw to approach it. Filled with surprise and fear, the man did so, and perceived that a large serpent of the kind named Cincoatl had entwined itself around the body of the animal and was contracting its coils violently. When the traveller realized the situation he reflected, "Which of these two shall I rescue?" Having determined to assist the coyote he took a stick, and wounding the serpent, caused it to loosen its hold and fall to the ground, whereupon both it and the coyote took to flight and disappeared in the bushes. After a while the coyote reappeared, carrying two cocks in its snout, and laid these before the man, making him a sign to take them. The animal then followed him to his house, and, having learned its whereabouts, absented itself, and soon returned with a hen. Two days later the grateful coyote presented another cock to its benefactor, and here the story ends.

According to Padre Sahagun a singular trait was ascribed to the Ocotochtli, identified by Padre Molina as the mountain cat or martin. It was believed that this animal devoted itself to the chase merely in order to obtain food for other wild beasts. It hunted men, deer, and other animals in the following fashion: concealing itself behind a tree it awaited its prey, then sprang upon it, and killed it instantly by passing its venomous tongue over the eyes of the victim. As soon as the man or animal fell dead the ocotochtli covered the body with moss, and, climbing a tree, uttered a cry that was heard from afar. When the wild beasts, such as the mountain lions, tigers, or ocelots, etc., heard this signal they understood that it was an invitation to a meal, and hastened to the spot, where they drank the blood and devoured the body of the victim. All this while the ocotochtli remained apart, watching the others eat. It abstained

from touching the food until the others had finished, and contented itself with what remained, out of consideration for the other animals. For, being so extremely venomous, its tongue would poison the meat and so cause the death of any other animal that might partake of it.

It is striking and curious that popular superstition should have endowed a lower animal with such noble traits as self-denial, delicate consideration, devotion to the interests of individuals of different species to its own. The idea, in itself, reflects credit upon those who developed, it and with this pleasing example of aboriginal thought and imagination I will close this brief and incomplete presentation of ancient Mexican folk-lore.

Zelia Nuttall.